

"In the words of the immortal Robert Johnson, the stuff we got will bust your brains out."

--Bob Dylan
(Grammy Awards acceptance speech for Album of the Year for *Time Out Of Mind*, February, 1998)

This collection of music from the years 1989 to 2006 is comprised not only of long dreamed of studio outtakes, but several performances of Dylan in concert, as well as documenting not only music from albums of that period but explorations in bluegrass and traditional folk music and blues.

Curiously enough, music is the topic that is often missing from the numerous books and thousands of articles written about Bob Dylan. Instead they dwell on whether he was the "voice of a generation," whether or not people booed at the Newport Folk Festival, or whether he would offer thoughts on the world situation. Rarely broached is the simple fact that throughout his career Bob Dylan has explored and continues to explore all facets of American roots-based as well as popular music.

When Bob Dylan began what is commonly referred to as the "Never Ending Tour" in 1988, in each set he included at least one traditional folk song. As the tour progressed the songs would change, some played often, some only once. This stopped for a while in '94, but started again in '95 and picked up with a vengeance in '99. By the mid-nineties, when the set lists for shows were posted on the Internet every night and a previously un-played song appeared, people would want to know what it was. Someone would inevitably have the source. Sometimes there would be more than one source. The result was that people would learn about music they wouldn't have known about otherwise, whether it was a Child ballad, the Carter Family, Reverend Gary Davis, or Johnny and Jack. As a friend told me recently, "I wouldn't have known about the Stanley Brothers if it wasn't for Bob Dylan." Simply by performing a song, Dylan accomplished what the purveyors of the sixties folk "revival" always wanted, without the didacticism, and, because of the Internet, the result was world-wide. He was, as he said in the film *No Direction Home*, a "musical expeditionary."

In the fall of 2000, he surprised audiences even further by delving into music that was if not quite jazz, certainly jazz and swing influenced. In Dublin, at the Point Depot, he debuted a dramatically rearranged "Tryin' To Get To Heaven." A couple of weeks later in Munster, he blew minds by pulling out his only previous excursion into anything

remotely jazz, "If Dogs Run Free," from the 1970 album *New Morning*. Exactly a month later in Bloomington, Indiana, he surprised audiences by including in the eight-song encore a Sons of the Pioneers song, "Blue Bonnet Girl," that had shades of Western Swing. The previous spring, Dylan had toured with the Western Swing band, Asleep At The Wheel, who for 40 years have been championing the music of Bob Wills. Six years later Wills would be one of the most played artists on Dylan's XM Satellite radio show, *Theme Time Radio Hour*. It was obvious Dylan was up to something, and the answer was found on his next album, *"Love And Theft"*, which was on one level - and with Bob Dylan there are always several levels - an exploration of specific American music genres. This was continued five years later to some degree on *Modern Times*.

This collection covers the period from *Oh Mercy* through *Modern Times*, and includes several outtakes from the sessions for *Oh Mercy* as well as the sessions for *Time Out Of Mind*, and songs written for movie soundtracks. These are complemented by several live tracks. There are no outtakes from *"Love And Theft"*.

Several of the tracks provide insight into how songs take shape in the studio, as well as Dylan's writing process. Often Dylan will have a line he wants to use and might try it in several songs before it finally finds a home. Sometimes that line can wait for years. This is nothing new. Early on, Dylan said that he'll carry a song in his head for a long time before finally writing it. A song may also go through several arrangements before the decision on which one to use is made. Sometimes, as hardcore Dylan fans well know, that decision is never made, which is among the reasons *The Bootleg Series* exists. "He left the best song off the album" is a common sentiment among Dylan fans and one I'm sure that will echo when this collection is heard. There is no great or defining *why* behind any of this, except that a musician doesn't hear his or her own work the same way those listening do. It could be how a line is phrased, an instrumental part doesn't seem right, or that the feel doesn't capture how the song was originally envisioned. Sometimes from a songwriters' perspective the song may not live up to what they intended to accomplish. Sometimes a song simply may not fit with the other songs on an album.

Hearing "Red River Shore" for the first time, I could not imagine where it would have fit on *Time Out Of Mind*. It is different from every other song on that album in feel, lyrics, and arrangement. Its inclusion would have altered the landscape of *Time Out Of Mind* considerably.

In March of 1989, Dylan went to New Orleans to record *Oh Mercy* with producer Daniel Lanois. Dylan's two previous studio albums lacked focus and cohesion. A sometimes strange mix of covers and originals, they were basically tracks culled together with various musicians from various sessions, and in the case of *Knocked Out Loaded* from various studios. The best Dylan albums feature him working with a core group of musicians where, once the sometimes elusive groove is found and the magic happens, it is maintained throughout the sessions. Lanois provided that core group of musicians and an environment conducive to creation by setting up a recording studio in a house where clocks and other extraneous factors weren't a consideration. Bob Dylan's extensive and eye-opening description of the sessions is in his book, *Chronicles Volume One*, and other accounts may be found in articles, interviews, and other books. All the accounts agree that the sessions didn't always go smoothly and the songs and arrangements didn't come easily. Dylan arrived in New Orleans only with a set of lyrics. The melodies and arrangements were to be discovered. Some songs were written during the sessions.

When *Oh Mercy* was released later that year, it was hailed as a return to form. I'd received an advance copy on cassette about a week before the album's release. I remember calling a friend and telling him that the new Dylan album's *really* good. He didn't believe me. Later that night, I went to see some friends play at a local bar, and my friend was there. I said, "Come out to my car right now," and played him "Ring Them Bells," "Man In The Long Black Coat," and "Most Of The Time." His disbelief changed immediately.

However, what no one knew until the release of *Bootleg Series Volumes 1-3*, followed by subsequent bootlegs, was that several major songs were left off the album. Two of those songs were rerecorded for Dylan's next album *Under The Red Sky*.

After *Under The Red Sky*, Dylan resumed his extensive touring schedule, stopping briefly that same year to record another album with The Traveling Wilburys. He would not record an album again for two years, and with the exception of such collaborations as "Heartland" with Willie Nelson, did not write another song for seven.

In 1992 and 1993, perhaps searching for his initial inspiration, Dylan recorded two albums of traditional folk and blues songs, *Good As I Been To You* and *World Gone Wrong*. *Good As I Been To You* was his first solo acoustic album in 28 years. Recording in his home studio, the production was minimal, the performances sometimes rough and unadorned.

January of 1997 found Dylan back in the studio, this time in Miami, with Daniel Lanois again producing. This time though, Dylan brought the musicians with him, including members of his touring band, drummer Jim Keltner, organist and accordionist Augie Meyers, keyboard player Jim Dickinson, and guitarists Duke Robillard and Bob Britt. Lanois, in addition to playing various guitars, brought in other musicians, drummer Brian Blades, percussionist Tony Mangurian, and slide guitar and dobro player Cindy Cashdollar.

After recording the album, Dylan returned to touring first in Japan, then in Canada and the U.S. Then at the end of May, in fact the beginning of Memorial Day weekend, came the startling news that Dylan had been hospitalized with a heart infection. I heard the news in my car leaving my day job, tuning to the all-news station to get the traffic report. I sat there in the parking lot numb for a few seconds, and went home to an answering machine crammed with messages and a similarly full inbox of e-mails. Dylan fans held their breath for a week until he was released from the hospital.

When *Time Out Of Mind* was released at the end of September, the songs were so dark that many people, not realizing when it was recorded, confused the illness with the album. On the Internet the discussions in the various Dylan forums started immediately: What does the title mean? Is it from Shakespeare? Is it from Warren Zevon? I always found it self-evident. In just about every song the protagonist is, well, going crazy. The light is too bright, or too dark, the room is too hot or too cold. He hears voices. Whatever the situation is, it's never right and far from comfortable.

Time Out Of Mind is dominated by the blues, with only four of its eleven songs being ballads. What separates the blues on *Time Out Of Mind* from the blues songs on previous albums is a conscious attempt to get the sound of the great blues records of the '50s. The blues has been a constant in Dylan's music throughout his career, and one could make a case for him being at heart a blues singer (while being many other things of course). Dylan has always made his blues his own, and when he sings the blues it is without the affectations of many of his contemporaries, whether it's "Black Crow Blues" or "Obviously Five Believers," "From A Buick Six" or "Meet Me In The Morning," "Are You Ready" or "'Til I Fell In Love With You."

Right around the time of the album's release, various articles and interviews appeared. Jim Dickinson, naming "Girl From The Red River Shore," said (what else?), "They left the best song off the record." Descriptions of the sessions sounded like legendary Dylan studio chaos with each take being different than the one before or in a

different key. I'd worked with steel guitarist Cindy Cashdollar who was a perfectionist in the studio and tried to imagine her in the situations I read about. I saw her backstage at an Asleep At The Wheel show in Atlantic City and asked her what the sessions were like. Expecting to hear a tale of misery, she surprised me by saying, "They were fine. Bob knew exactly what he wanted."

Bob Dylan told the *New York Times*, "Many of my records are more or less blueprints for the songs. This time I didn't want blueprints, I wanted the real thing. When the songs are done right they're done right, and that's it. They're written in stone when they're done right."

Within a year, the onstage arrangements of many of those songs had changed considerably.

In the songs included on this set for the first time, all kinds of surprises await. In the alternate versions of songs from previously released albums, whether live or in the studio, you may see them in a whole new light. If you care to dig deeper into the lyrics, you may find literary references that span the scope of time. If you follow the musical connections that were begun on *"Love And Theft"*, and delved into even further on *Modern Times*, you'll find they cover the wide canvas of American popular music.

-Peter Stone Brown
Philadelphia, 2008